

I am writing in support of Bill Number 317, an act concerning dyslexia. I am a mother of a dyslexic child and an elementary teacher. I live in Orange, Connecticut. I have spent countless hours fighting for my son to receive a free and appropriate education at his public school.

My son struggled through kindergarten, first, second and third grade. Some teachers tried to help him but he wasn't making adequate progress. If I left the school alone, he would have continued to flounder through school and been pushed along. My bright child felt stupid and couldn't read what his friends enjoyed. In fourth grade my son was given a one-to-one teacher who was trained in Orton Gillingham. This trained professional was hired from outside the district because they didn't have anyone trained to properly deliver this specialized instruction. He was also given an iPad and audio books. This wasn't easy to get for him; it took a complaint placed at the state level to get my son what he needed to be successful. Having a proper intervention, a trained professional and access to print through audio books opened a door for my child. He started to respond to his intervention and reading using audio books became enjoyable. Unfortunately, the team of teachers working with my son in school didn't understand his disability. While the intervention was working, school was still a miserable place. Untrained teachers were ignorant of my son's needs on a day to day basis. If the teachers had been properly trained to understand his disability, they might have understood my son's struggles. He had a special education teacher that made it clear that she felt it was my son's behavior, not disability, that was impacting his progress in school. Even with an outside diagnosis of dyslexia, the teachers didn't want to believe that if they changed their teaching, he would respond to instruction. Instead they blamed my son for his failures. Despite his negative experiences in school, the Orton Gillingham was working. Unfortunately, fifth grade didn't get any better. Untrained teachers caused more anxiety for my son. At my son's PPT, I asked for the new dyslexia box to be checked instead of just leaving learning disabled on his IEP. The special education teacher stated that she didn't feel it was appropriate. This was proof that she didn't believe he was dyslexic because she didn't understand dyslexia. My son is not lazy or stupid, like the fourth and fifth grade teachers wanted me to believe. My son is bright, creative and very motivated to learn. His motivation started to dwindle because he was continually being beaten down by his teachers. The professionals who are supposed to be the caring, well-educated adults, were doing more harm than good. These elementary school years would have been different if the teachers had been properly trained in dyslexia. This is my son's last year in elementary school. He is now in 6th grade. He has a new special education teacher who has some training and knowledge about dyslexia. His teachers get ongoing training from the special education teacher. My son went from what the teachers called a behavior problem to a happy, well behaved student. His sixth grade teacher even told me at conferences that my son was one of the best behaved in class. While my son still struggles in school, the change in teacher attitude has made all the difference in his day to day learning. My son happily goes to school each day. His confidence has returned. His grades have improved. The day to day struggles have not disappeared but teachers who understand his disability help him to succeed. I hope that he continues to have teachers that nurture his strengths and understand his weaknesses.

While my son was lucky to have a mother that fought for him to have the proper intervention, what happens to the child who doesn't have a parent who knows what to fight for? All dyslexic children should have the same opportunity to high quality and appropriate teaching. As a teacher I have seen many students slip through the cracks. Dyslexic children are bright and need to be understood. Please add to this bill that teachers should receive ongoing and quality training in both understanding dyslexic children and the proper methods to teach them. Schools need to help these children, so they all have an opportunity to succeed. From year to year, I should not have the constant worry of wondering whether the new teachers will understand dyslexia and be equipped to teach my son according to his needs.

While I support Senate Bill 317, it is NOT enough to support our dyslexic students and their teachers. All teachers need ongoing, quality training in dyslexia and research based interventions. New teacher preparation programs needs more than just one "course" in dyslexia. Teachers need to be trained to teach students reading using the current brain based research. All teachers need to understand how to recognize and support dyslexic students. They can't do this if they don't understand dyslexia. All public schools must be equipped to teach dyslexic students with qualified and trained teachers.